

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

SAN JACINTO RIVER WASTE PITS FEDERAL SUPERFUND SITE

OPEN HOUSE AND COMMUNITY MEETING

Highlands Community Center
604 Highland Woods Drive, Texas

Thursday, January 30, 2014
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Summary of Questions, Concerns, and Comments

Meeting participants stated several questions, concerns, and comments, including remedial alternatives; Responsible Parties; sample locations; dioxin levels; water quality; health issues (i.e., cancer clusters and other health problems in the Highlands community), and health advisories; where to go if they have health problems; fish consumption; commercial crabbers; and barge traffic.

The EPA staff presented information on the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS), the Time Critical Removal Action (TCRA) armor cap, Site status, and the Superfund process.

The Feasibility Study indicates a recommended cleanup option. However, a cleanup option has not been selected. The EPA will present the remedial alternatives to its Environmental Review Board prior to presenting remedial alternatives to the public. The EPA will have a public meeting to present the cleanup options to the public and to receive public comments prior to selecting a remedial action. Subsidence is a concern, which will be considered during this process. The EPA will consequently select a remedy.

The remedial action process could take several years. The selected remedial action must meet certain criteria, including protective and safe. EPA staff presented six remedial alternatives. Meeting participants were highly favorable about remedial alternative six, which includes a removal action. A partial or complete removal could take about 16 months. The cap or a portion of the armor cap would have to be removed during the process. Concerns include what could occur when the armor cap is off. Meeting participants suggested other alternatives, including incineration on site or off-site.

The TCRA armor cap was installed to secure the waste pits until the best remedy is selected. Several years ago, during a site inspection, the TCEQ determined there was a problem with the cap and notified the EPA. The EPA conducted a site inspection and determined rock had washed away from the Site. The EPA contacted the Responsible Parties, International Paper and MIMC, and directed them to install larger rock.

The EPA consulted with the [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers (USACE) to determine what happened to the cap. The USACE report included concerns about the cap construction and design, rock placement and quantity. The EPA issued a letter to the responsible parties to immediately address concerns. The RP(s) recently completed the cap repairs, including changing the slope and installing additional and larger rock.

Sample locations included areas closest to the pits, close to the water, and flood plains. Some [contaminants] were detected below health standards.

There were concerns about toxicity of dioxins and several questions about acceptable levels (for dioxin). EPA staff indicated the acceptable number for dioxin is “220” and that dioxin does not break down very quickly.

Meeting participants expressed several health related concerns. They indicated Highlands community residents and animals are dying. Also, local physicians do not know how to address their health issues. Additionally, the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) should conduct an epidemiological study. Some individuals and commercial crabbers are ignoring fish advisories and selling contaminated fish [for consumption] in other areas.

TDSHS staff stated the agency has spent hundreds of hours in the area, advising people about the fish advisories. They recently distributed approximately 2400 pieces of material in the Channelview area, including RV parks along Interstate Highway 10. Residents with health concerns should consult with their personal physician. The TDSHS can provide physician education assistance.

There were also stated concerns about increase in barge activity on the north and south sides of the Site. EPA staff stated increased barge activity is a concern.

The EPA stated the Southern Impoundment is currently under investigation.